NUMB. CCXXXVII.

The SPECTATOR.

Visu carentem magna Pars Veri latet.
Senec. in OEdip.

Saturday, December 1. 1711.

It is very reasonable to believe, that part of the Pleasure which happy Minds shall enjoy in a future State, will arise from an enlarged Contemplation of the Divine Wisdom in the Government of the World, and a Discovery of the several amazing Steps of Providence, from the Beginning to the End of Time. Nothing seems a higher Entertainment more adapted to the Nature of Man, if we consider that Curiosity is one of the largest and most lasting Appetites implanted in us, and that Admiration is one of our most delightful Passions; and what a perpetual Succession of Wonders will be afforded to both these, in a Scene large and various as shall then be laid open to our View in the Society of superior Spirits, who perhaps joyn with us in so delightful a Work.

It is impossible, on the contrary, that part of the Misery of such as are excluded from Bliss may arise only in their being denied this Privilege, and leaving their Appetites at the same time vastly improved, without any Satisfaction afforded to them. Of these, the vain Pursuit of Knowledge shall, we are told, add to their Infelicity, and bewilder them in Mazes of Error, Darkness, Distraction, and Doubt of every thing but their own Evil State. Milton has thus represented the fallen Angels reasoning together in a kind of Respite from their Torments, and creating to themselves a new Disquiet from their very Amusements; he could not properly have described the Sports of condemned Spirits without that Cast of Horror and Melancholy which so judiciously mingled with them.

Part sate on a Hill retir'd,
In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate,
Fixt fate, free will, Foreknowledge absolute,
And found no End, in wandring Mazes lost.

Our present Condition, which is a middle State, wherein we are, as it were, chequered with Truth and Falshood, and as our Faculties are narrow and imperfect, it is impossible but our Curiosity must meet with many Repulses. The Business of Mankind in this Life being rather to act than to know, but little Portion of Knowledge is dealt to them at present.

Hence it is, that the Reason of the Inquisitive has so long been exercised with Difficulties, and stumbles for the promiscuous Distribution of Good and Evil to the virtuous and the wicked in this World. From hence come all those Pathetical Complaints of so many Tragical Events, which befall the Wise and the Good; and of such surprising Prosperity, which is often the Reward of the Guilty and the Foolish; that Reason is sometimes puzzled, and at a loss what to pronounce upon so mysterious a Dispensation.

Plato expresses his Abhorrence of some Fables of the Poets, which seem to reflect on the Gods as the Authors of Injustice; and lays it down as a Principle, that whatever is permitted to befal a Just Man, whether Poverty, Sickness, or any of those things which seem to be Evils, shall either in Life or Death conduce to his Good. My Reader will observe how agreeable this Maxim is to what we find delivered by a greater Authority. *Seneca* has written a Discourse purposely on this Subject, in which he takes Pains, after the Doctrine of the *Stoicks*, to shew, that Adversity is not in it self an Evil; and mentions a noble Saying of *Demetrius*, That *nothing would be more Unhappy than a Man who had never known Affliction*. He compares Prosperity to the Indulgence of a fond Mother to a Child, which often proves his Ruin; but the Affection of the Divine Being to that of a Wise Father, who would have his Sons exercised with Labour, Disappointment and Pain, that they may gather Strength, and improve their Fortitude. On this Occasion the Philosopher rises into that celebrated Sentiment, that there is not on Earth a Spectacle more worthy for a Creator intent on his Works, than a brave Man superior to his Sufferings; to which he adds, that it must be a Pleasure to *Jupiter* himself to look down from Heaven, and see *Cato* amidst the Ruins of his Country preserving his Integrity.

This Thought will appear yet more reasonable, if we consider Human Life as a State of Probation, and Adversity as the Post of Honour in it, assign'd often to the best and most select Spirits.

But what I would chiefly insist on here, is, that we are not at present in a proper Situation to judge of the Counsels by which Providence acts, since but little arrives at our Knowledge, and even that little we discern imperfectly; or, according to the elegant Figure in Holy Writ, *we see but in part, and as in a Glass darkly*. Since Providence therefore in its OEconomy regards the whole System of Time and Things together, we cannot discover the beautiful Connexions between Incidents which lye widely separated in Time, and by losing so many Links of the Chain, our Reasonings become broken and imperfect. Thus those Parts in the Moral World which have not an absolute, may yet have a relative Beauty, in respect of some other Parts concealed from us, but open to his Eye before whom *Past*, *Present* and *To come*, are set together in one point of View; and those Events, the Permission of which seems now to accuse his Goodness, may in the Consummation of Things, both magnifie his Goodness and exalt his Wisdom. And this is enough to check

check our Presumption, since it is in vain to apply our Measures of Regularity to Matters of which we know neither the Antecedents nor the Consequents, the Beginning nor the End.

I shall relieve my Readers from this abstracted Thought, by relating here a *Jewish* Tradition concerning *Moses*, which seems to be a kind of Parable, illustrating what I have last mentioned. That great Prophet, it is said, was called up by a Voice from Heaven to the Top of a Mountain; where, in a Conference with the Supreme Being, he was permitted to propose to him some Questions concerning his Administration of the Universe. In the midst of this Divine Conference he was commanded to look down on the Plain below. At the Foot of the Mountain there issued out a clear Spring of Water, at which a Soldier alighted from his Horse to Drink. He was no sooner gone than a little Boy came to the same Place, and finding a Purse of Gold which the Soldier had dropped, took it up and went away with it. Immediately after this came an Infirm old Man, weary with Age and Travelling, and having quenched his Thirst, sat down to rest himself by the side of the Spring. The Soldier missing his Purse returns to search for it, and demands it of the old Man, who affirms he had not seen it, and appeals to Heaven in witness of his Innocence. The Soldier, not believing his Protestations, kills him. *Moses* fell on his Face with Horror and Amazement, when the Divine Voice thus prevented his Expostulation, 'Be not surprised, *Moses*, nor ask 'why the Judge of the whole Earth hath suffer'd 'this thing to come to pass; the Child is the Occasion that the Blood of the old Man is spilt; but 'know, that the old Man whom thou saweſt was 'the Murderer of that Child's Father.

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